

Israeli Policies from the Period of Military Rule until Today

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Despite the persistence of the Zionist project's view of the Palestinians as a security and demographic threat, just because of their existence, policies toward the Palestinians since the establishment of the State of Israel are not necessarily fixed, but are influenced by several factors: local (Palestinian and Israeli), regional and global.

This article attempts to read the constants, and the changes, in Israeli policy toward the Palestinians in Israel. It starts from the fact that these policies are not separate from Israel's dealings with the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people as a whole, but derived from it.

This article focuses on two specific periods: the period of military rule, and the period of right-wing governments following the October 2000 uprising. The article argues that the policies of the Mapai party toward the Palestinians in Israel during the first two decades of the establishment of the State of Israel (the period of military rule) were not static, but were fundamentally influenced by the interests of the Jewish State and its institutions. The article also argues that the current phase that this group of Palestinians is living, although has some resemblance to the period of military rule, differs from it and can be considered the most threatening to the identity of this Palestinian group and its symbolic existence.

Military Rule

Phase One: “Isolation of the Palestinians”

The Nakba in 1948 was the first phase of the implementation of the Zionist colonialist settlement project. The Zionist military forces expelled around 750 thousand Palestinians and vacated hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns from their original inhabitants.

The first years, immediately after the Nakba, were the beginning of the second phase of the project building. During which the main focus of the Zionist movement was in building the institutions of the new State. The institutions' main preoccupation, like any colonial settlement project, was with expansion, expropriation of the land, and the replacement of the indigenous people with new settlers to build a new society, without the Palestinians.

Settlement expansion was the central objective at that stage of institutionalizing the settlement project in the form of a State. It was therefore no accident that the laws and military orders initially targeted the land. From December 1948, as a prelude to the enactment of the Absentee Property Law in March 1950 (in which Israel succeeded in confiscating thousands of dunams¹ and appropriating Palestinian property), Israel used Article 125 of the Emergency Regulations, Emergency Order No. 125, and the Emergency Regulations (Security Areas) Act

¹ The dunam is 1,000 square meters.

of 1949, as well as emergency regulations for the confiscation of “fallow lands.” All these orders gave the Military Governors and the Defense Minister broad authority to declare certain areas closed military zones, which subsequently paved them for confiscation.²

In order to ensure the confiscation of land and the expansion of settlements, the Zionist institution had to conceal the Palestinians from the public sphere, and from the imagination of the settlement group. To do that, it forcefully prevented the return of the refugees, imposed military rule on the remaining Palestinians, and isolated them in ghettos.

Perhaps what distinguishes these years is the continued uprooting of entire Palestinian villages and the displacement of their indigenous people within what has become to be known as, the borders of the State of Israel. For example, in November 1948, the inhabitants of the villages of Iqrit and Kafr Bir'am were displaced. In February 1949, the people of Kafr Anan were displaced. In January 1950, the inhabitants of El-Gabsiya were expelled from their village and the inhabitants of Majdal were expelled in July 1950. This did not mean that the authorities did not expel Palestinians outside the borders of the State, but did so when the opportunity arose. In February 1951, they expelled the inhabitants of 13 Arab villages from the Wadi Ara area, beyond the borders of what became known as the State of Israel.³

On the other side of the equation of construction of the settlement project, the Jewish State was preoccupied with bringing settlers and organizing the new society, without the Palestinians. In addition to the need for the land owned by the Palestinians, the project sought to isolate them from the labor market and prevent their competition with the new settlers, with their poor experience in agriculture and construction. Most of the settlers who came to Palestine in the early years were professionals that were not suited for the labor market in the new country. Military rule was the central tool for achieving this goal.

The expulsion of the Palestinian population from their original villages, into areas within the borders of the State of Israel shows that the main concern of the State, at this stage of the project, was settlement expansion and control of the land. This would not have been achieved without the actual and imagined obliteration of the Palestinians. In other words, in the early years of the military rule, the Palestinians were not “subjects” that preoccupied Israel, but their ownership of the land was its main concern. Of course, this does not negate the fact that the desire of the Jewish State was to get rid the Palestinians absolutely and completely, but as the historian Adel Manna (2016) asserts, it waited for the right opportunity to implement a collective transfer.

The Kafr Qassem Massacre – A Turning Point

The Palestinians, despite receiving Israeli citizenship, remained outside the building project of the State of Israel for a relatively long period, which lasted until the mid-1950s. This period was sufficient for building an important part of the settlement project in the form of a State, in which it passed basic laws for the confiscation of land and the reception of nearly one million settlers.

² Jiryis, Sabri. (1967). **Arabs in Israel**. Jerusalem: League of Arab States in Jerusalem.

³ Cohen, Hillel. (2002). **Present Absentees: Palestinian refugees in Israel since 1948**. Jerusalem: Center for Arab Community Studies in Israel.

Manna, Adel. (2016). **Nakba and Survival: The Story of Palestinians who remained in Haifa and Galilee (1948-1956)**. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies.

The Kafr Qassem massacre (1956) is a pivotal moment in Israel's dealings with this group of Palestinians. On the one hand, the beginning of the massacre was an expression of the continued attempts to expand the space through the physical destruction of the original owners of the land. While its end came to announce the failure to transfer the Palestinians outside the boundaries of the State project. Thus causing a change to marginalization of the Palestinians within the project. Israel's policy toward the Palestinians changed from expelling and obliterating them to a policy of curtailment of their presence, and the beginning of engineering the way and conditions of their existence so as not to threaten the Jewish State and to be used in the service of continuing the process of state building.

Phase Two: “Supply of Cheap Labor”

The end of the 1950s witnessed several indicators that reflected a shift in Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. This included the establishment of the “Mapai Committee for Arab Affairs” in 1957 and the beginning of a discussion of recommendations to deal with the Palestinians, as in a document by Shmuel Dibon (Advisor to the Prime Minister for Arab Affairs). This document stated “the government’s policy regarding the minority has reached a crossroads and must decide [...] it must be assumed that a collective Arab migration from the country cannot be expected in the foreseeable future, so this possibility should be removed from the agenda when the future policy is delineated”.⁴

At this stage, official policies focused on the economic aspect, aimed at using cheap labor to benefit the Jewish State's economy on the one hand, and preventing the establishment of a separate Arab economy that would pose a threat to the Jewish State on the other. In this regard, the end of the 1950s witnessed facilitation in the permit system. This was reflected in the increase in the number of permits issued to the Palestinians, the reduction in areas requiring a special permit for entry, and the granting of permits for a longer period than previously. This easing coincided with a decline in unemployment in the Jewish community.

Thus, following the integration of the settlers into the labor market and the rise of settlers in the professional ladder, Palestinians were allowed into the labor market and were concentrated primarily in agriculture and construction. Yair Boimel⁵ points out that the “Five-Year Plan for the Development of the Arab Society” in 1961, and the second in 1967 (after the end of military rule) well expressed the objectives of this phase. The results of these plans were reflected in the development and modernization of the infrastructure in the Arab villages, while refraining from establishing a local Arab industry. These policies resulted in a rise in the standard of living of the Palestinians and an increase in their consumption capacity, which effectively meant the return of Palestinian income to the Israeli market.

We cannot claim that the policy of physical cleansing of the Palestinians, and the desire to completely get rid of them, has entirely disappeared from Israel's policies. On the contrary, it is still present in some Israeli circles to this day. In parallel, a new policy developed, that for many years focused on attempts to control all areas of Palestinians’ lives, and undermine the political, economic and social capabilities of their society.

⁴ Source mentioned in: Boimel, Yair. (2014). “The Function of Military Rule: Phenomenon, Background and Discussion on its Abolition.” In Kabha, Mustafa. (Ed.). **The Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel: Under Military Rule and its Legacy** (p. 19). Haifa: Mada al-Carmel - Arab Center for Applied Social Studies.

⁵ Ibid.

Israel's Policies after the October 2000 Uprising

The October 2000 uprising, which erupted in the wake of Ariel Sharon's provocative raid on the Al-Aqsa Mosque with dozens of security men, is another milestone in Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. In my opinion, it is summed up in the transition from dealing with the Palestinians as a group that must be controlled, to individuals who can be absorbed into shaping the structure of the colonial settlement society under certain conditions, which Israel seeks to enforce.

The need for this change is due to several factors, the most important of which is the need for Israel to integrate the Palestinians into the labor market in line with the interests of its neoliberal economy. In addition to Israel's desire to eliminate the common national identity of the Palestinians inside Israel with the Palestinian people, which strongly emerged during the October uprising. Furthermore, its attempts to resolve the conflict with the Palestinian people, the elimination of the Palestinian cause and the attempt to force Palestinian recognition of the Jewishness of the State, and impose this as a *fait accompli*.

The danger of this phase stems from the fact that it sought to integrate Palestinians as individuals by erasing the collective Palestinian identity, while imposing the Jewishness of the State as a *fait accompli* and promoting Jewish ethnic citizenship. In parallel with serious and direct active attempts to limit Palestinian citizenship inside Israel, taking advantage of local, regional and global conditions to achieve this.

This is reflected in several areas, including the official Israeli institutions dealing with the recommendations of the Or and Lapid Commissions. Over time, it became clear that the recommendations of these Commissions, contrary to the prevailing belief, formed the basis for the development and implementation of a deliberate policy toward the Palestinians in Israel. This policy was based heavily on the recommendations of the Commissions in their progressive and disproportionate repression.⁶

The most prominent of these changes, was the escalation of State policy by targeting the Palestinian political leadership. This began with the leaders that the Or Commission and the Lapid Ministerial Committee accused of inciting the public and held them responsible for the escalation of events in the October Uprising, in particular Azmi Bishara and Sheikh Raed Salah, both of whom were distanced from the direct Palestinian political arena.

The targeting was not limited to Bishara and Salah, and was not limited to the immediate period after the October Uprising, but continued and escalated to the political representation of the Palestinians itself. In recent years, especially during Netanyahu's tenure, the culture of political persecution toward the representatives of the Palestinian society in Israel has been marked by persistent incitement against the leaders, culminating in the enactment of the "suspension law." The targeting of the Islamic Movement (the northern branch) and outlawing it and its institutions (November 2015). Furthermore, the targeting of the national identity by law (as in the Nakba Law), the deepening of attempts to criminalize and undermine any social political movement, which in the eyes of the authorities is a threat to the Jewishness of the State (as in the Law of Associations), the use of violence against

⁶ Shulhut, Antwan. and Shehadeh, Mtanes. (2015). 1948 Palestinians between the jaws of the prosecution of symbols of national consciousness and the criminalization of political action. **Mada files** (7) Palestinians inside Israel and the October Uprising. Haifa: Mada al-Carmel.

demonstrators, pursuing activists in order to intimidate them and attempts to control and impose strict surveillance over social networks.

The economic policies of the State may be one of the most serious policies of recent governments, along with codification. The State's economic policies attempt to grant material concessions in return for the relinquishment of national collective rights and loyalty to the Jewish State. As in the case of promoting civil service among the youth, and in the Five-Year Plan for the Development of the Arab society in Israel (approved by the Government in resolution 922 on 30 December 2016). In this plan, rights were linked to duties in an attempt to trade out citizenship through loyalty to the Jewish State.⁷

Attempts by the Israeli authorities to link rights to loyalty to the Jewishness of the State and regulating Palestinian society by controlling Local Authorities are no less dangerous than the other policies. This has emerged in the economic plan itself, which gives Local Authorities some power, while at the same time tries to subjugate them, as in the budget increase for Civil Service Support authorities. It also emerged in the Kimmons Act (adopted in April 2017), which gives Local Authorities a certain power in planning and construction, but at the same time, turns it into a tool for controlling demolition and punishment. This may transform the Local Authorities into influential bodies, while at the same time turn them into partners in the intimidation of Palestinian society, and executive arms of the government's Israelization policy.

These policies combine to pose a real threat to Palestinian society inside Israel, especially given the increasing poverty, the increase in violence, and the rooting of internal tensions, such as sectarianism and familialism. Other factors contribute to facilitating the targeting of Palestinian society, including the clinical death of the so-called "peace process" and the inertia of popular resistance in the West Bank. Added to this, is the impact of the Arab regional scene in general and the Syrian Nakba in particular, as well as the rising popularity of the Right in America and Europe. These are all frustrating factors, making the Palestinian society an easy prey for attempts at subjugation, adaptation and Israelization.

Summary

What I have tried to discuss in this article is that the changes in Israel's dealings with the Palestinians inside Israel since its inception, until the present day, confirm its colonialist settlement nature, which sees the eradication of the indigenous people as an organized principle. This was reflected in the policies of obliteration and expulsion in the Nakba of 1948, then the obliteration and nullification in the first phase of the military rule period and the exploitation of labor in the second phase, to attempts to integrate individuals and erase Palestinian identity at a later phase.

The importance of dismantling the constant and changing equation is to enable us, people and leadership, to diagnose the different policies in order to ensure a more accurate reading of the challenges of the phase. So as to increase the possibilities of confronting these challenges, fortifying the society toward them, and to transforming Palestinian political action from reaction to public political planning and organization for confrontation.

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⁷ Zoabi, Himmat. (2016). "Palestinians in Israel: Citizenship Conditional on the Acceptance of the Jewishness of the State." In: Huneida Ghanem (Ed.). **Madar Strategic Report 2016**. Ramallah: Madar.